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Despite Expectations, \$225,000 Entry Associate Salaries Lag at Large Law Firms

The *2025 U.S. Associate Salary Survey* report, released today by NALP, reveals that the median first-year associate base salary hit \$200,000 as of January 1, 2025—rising to \$215,000 in the largest firms with over 700 lawyers. Notably, participation in the survey from firms with more than 250 lawyers accounted for 87% of the 437 respondents, up from 81% in 2023.

“Without the stiff competition of the talent wars to push it along, the market is not moving as quickly to follow the few big firms who have announced first-year pay increases as we saw in the last cycle,” said NALP Executive Director Nikia Gray. “Most notably, while some firms are now offering an eye-popping \$225,000 entry-level salary, the overall median first-year salary and the median first-year salary at the largest firms remained flat compared to the figures NALP reported in 2023, indicating that the market softened over the last two years and there is less pressure on firms to increase salaries in order to remain competitive.”

While some large law firms boosted entry-level associate salaries to \$225,000 in late 2023 and early 2024, most have yet to follow suit. Only 32% of offices reported offering this amount to first-year hires, though the rate was higher—45%—among firms of 701+ lawyers. Still, \$225,000 emerged as the most frequently reported salary figure, suggesting a potential trend. In many cases, it takes at least two years for salary increases to ripple through the legal industry. Entry-level associate compensation can also vary significantly by market, and in fact, in six cities (Austin, Boston, Houston, New York City, San Francisco, and the Washington, DC area), the median starting salary has reached \$225,000.

It is important to note that because the respondent pool for the survey varies each year, the use of the *Associate Salary Survey* data across different years to discern trends should be done with caution, as these analyses do not contain salary scales for a set group of firms. Salary adjustments on the part of some large firms in recent years

and law firm acquisitions and mergers can result in the size of a law firm changing, and fluctuations in the distribution of respondents play a role in determining changes in median salaries within the report.

The full *2025 U.S. Associate Salary Survey* report is available for purchase at www.nalp.org/bookstore.

Key Insights:

- While several firms raised their first-year associate salaries to \$225,000 in late 2023 and 2024, the overall median salary remained at \$200,000 across all participating law offices. Among the largest firms with more than 700 lawyers, the median was higher at \$215,000 but still shy of the \$225,000 figure.
- Although the median first-year salary has not yet reached \$225,000, it was the modal, or most frequently reported figure, accounting for 32% of all entry-level base salaries and 45% among offices in firms of 701+ lawyers.
- Geography continues to have a considerable impact on salary differences across regions, cities, and states. This year's report contains analyses for 19 cities, as well as additional states and regions not encompassed by those cities. These analyses reveal a wide spectrum of law firm compensation, with median first-year salaries ranging from \$170,000 to \$225,000 across those cities.
- Six of those 19 cities now offer a median entry-level associate salary of \$225,000: Austin, Boston, Houston, New York City, San Francisco, and the Washington, DC area.
- NALP's analyses also include regional salary data for locations outside of the 19 cities included in the report. Starting salaries of \$225,000 are found less frequently in offices in smaller U.S. cities and towns. For locations outside of the major markets included in the report, the highest median first-year associate base salary was in the West (\$181,900), followed by the Northeast (\$170,000). The lowest salaries were in the South and Midwest, with a median first-year salary of \$160,000.
- For intellectual property associates, median salaries were typically higher, with a median first-year salary of \$225,000.
- The median weekly salary for second-year summer associates in 2025 was \$3,850 across all firms, and \$4,100 in the largest firms of more than 700 lawyers.
- Nearly three-quarters (73%) of law offices offered judicial clerkship bonuses, although bonus amounts varied by type of clerkship.

Median Base Salaries by Associate Year and Firm Size

(in \$/year unless otherwise noted, as of January 1, 2025)

Associate Year	FIRM SIZE — Number of Lawyers							
	250 or Fewer		251-700		701+		All Sizes	
	Median	# Rept.	Median	# Rept.	Median	# Rept.	Median	# Rept.
First	\$150,000	48	\$190,000	159	\$215,000	152	\$200,000	359
Second	157,500	41	191,250	157	225,000	153	210,000	351
Third	161,250	42	205,000	157	250,000	139	220,625	338
Fourth	172,500	43	220,000	159	291,250	140	238,125	342
Fifth	180,000	43	235,000	159	315,000	145	255,000	347
Sixth	195,000	41	250,000	157	340,000	146	271,175	344
Seventh	200,000	41	260,000	147	360,000	140	286,700	328
Eighth	197,500	34	318,750	74	375,000	134	330,000	242

Summer Associates (\$/week)

1st year	\$2,525	36	\$3,850	130	\$4,100	158	\$3,850	324
2nd year	3,200	41	3,850	129	4,100	170	3,850	340
3rd year	3,275	16	4,325*	43	—	—	3,900	79

Note: All figures are based on average salaries reported. The "# Rept." column indicates the number of offices reporting. For purposes of this summary report, medians have been rounded to the nearest \$25. A dash indicates that fewer than five unique firms reported salary data.

** This figure was reported by more than half of the offices in this category and is also the high and prevailing salary for this grouping.*

Detailed Data on Associate Salaries

The *2025 U.S. Associate Salary Survey* report provides information about U.S. associate and summer associate salaries by firm size, region, and the metropolitan area population; detailed salary analyses for 19 major markets; analyses of salaries for offices using a levels-based compensation system; base salaries for Class of 2025 associates by firm size and city; salaries for intellectual property lawyers, salaries for law clerks and staff attorneys; and more. NALP has published the *U.S. Associate Salary Survey* report since 1996.

Purchase the *2025 U.S. Associate Salary Survey* report at www.nalp.org/bookstore. To request an interview, contact media@nalp.org.

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